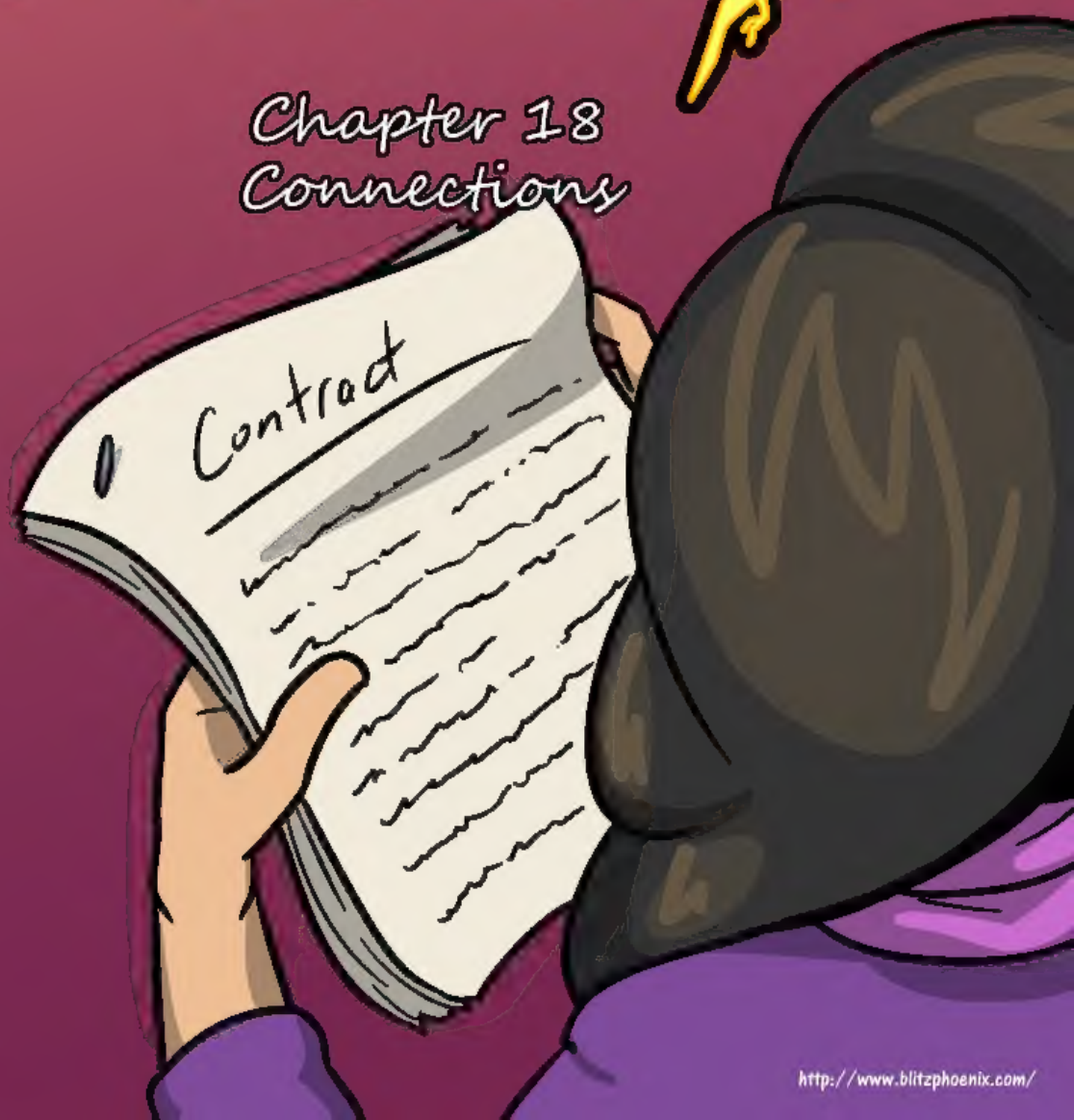
Blitz Phoenix

Chapter 18
Connections



Emily Brackhan

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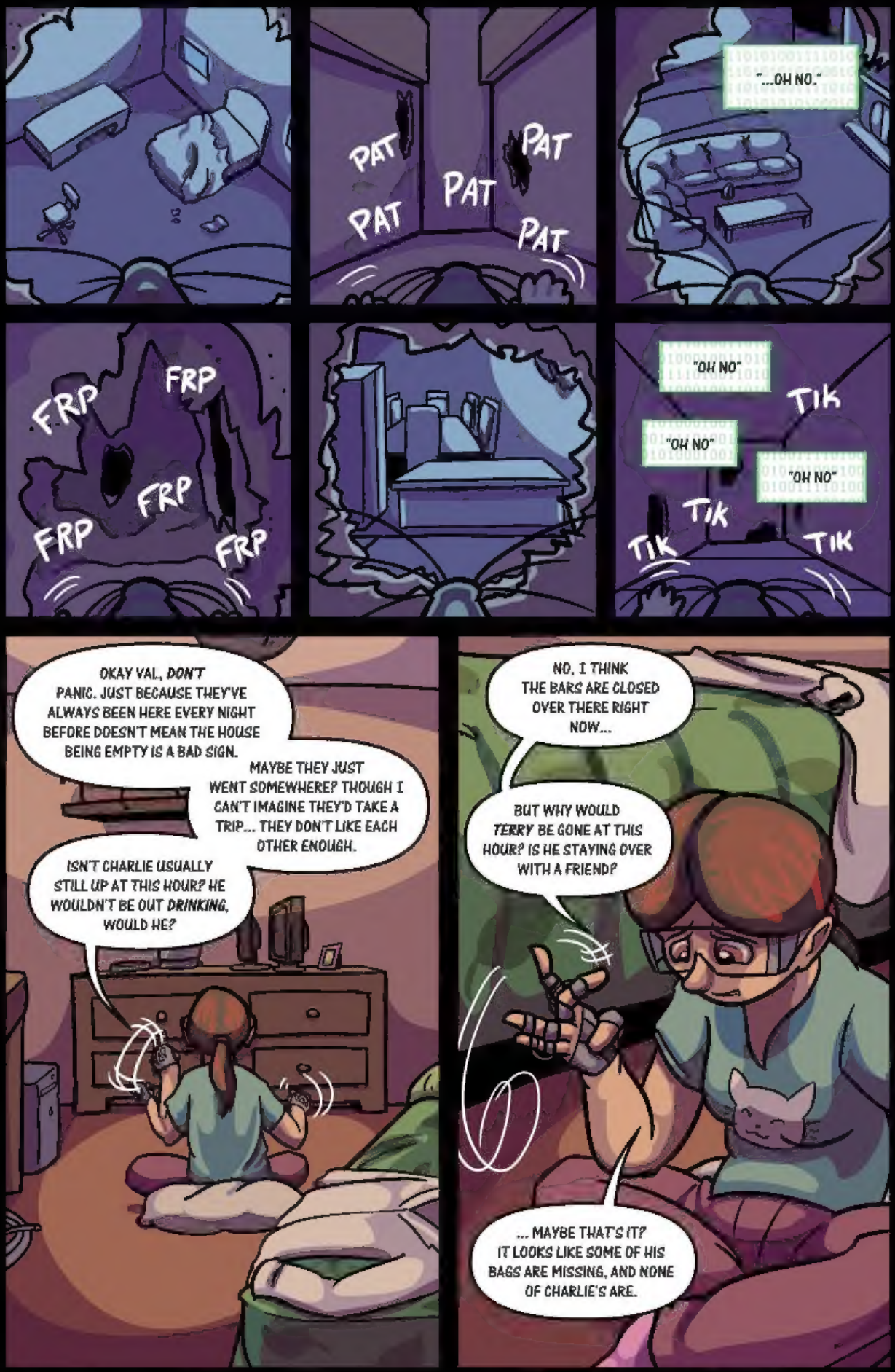
PAT
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"...OH NO."
FRP
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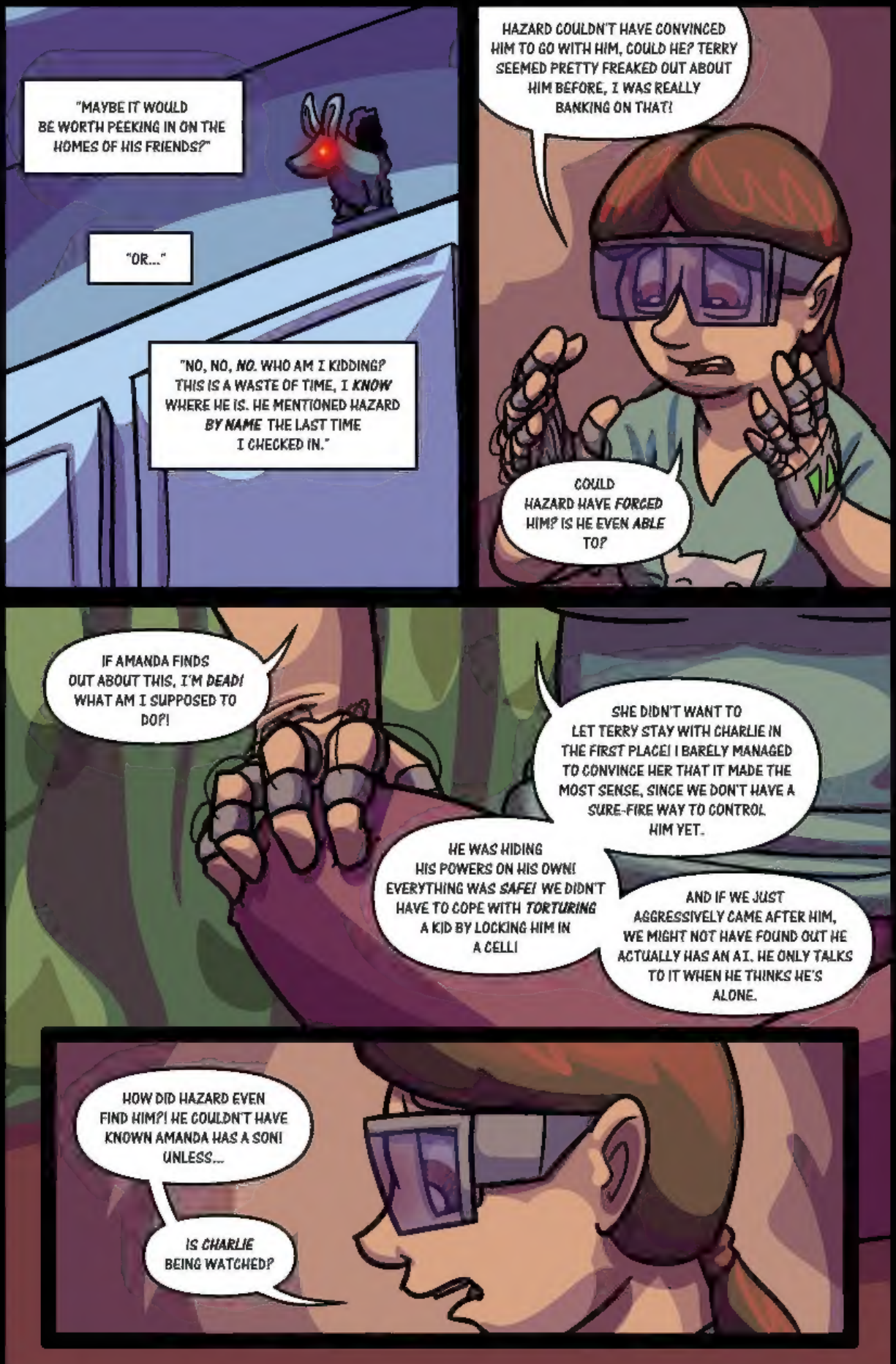
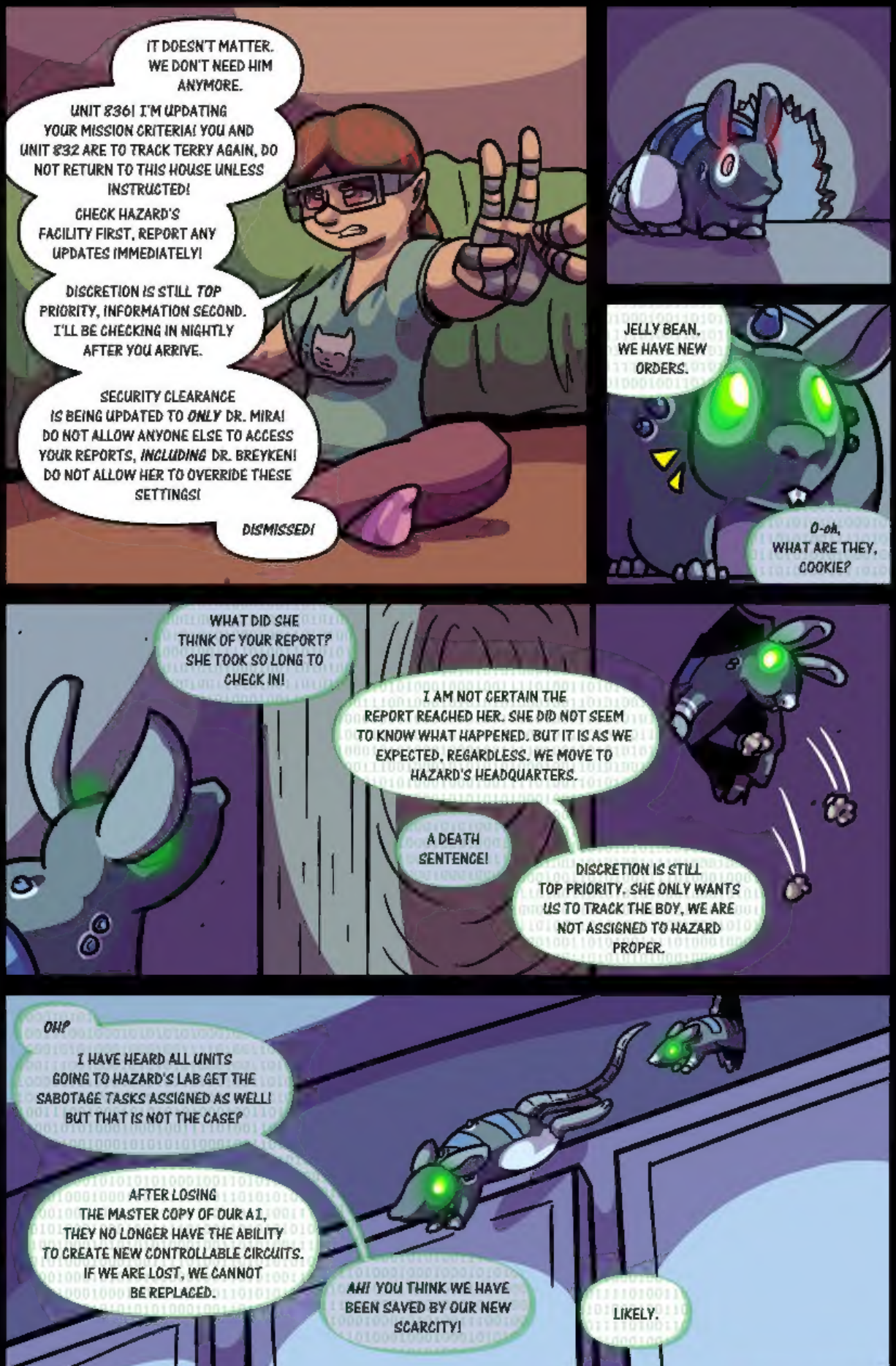
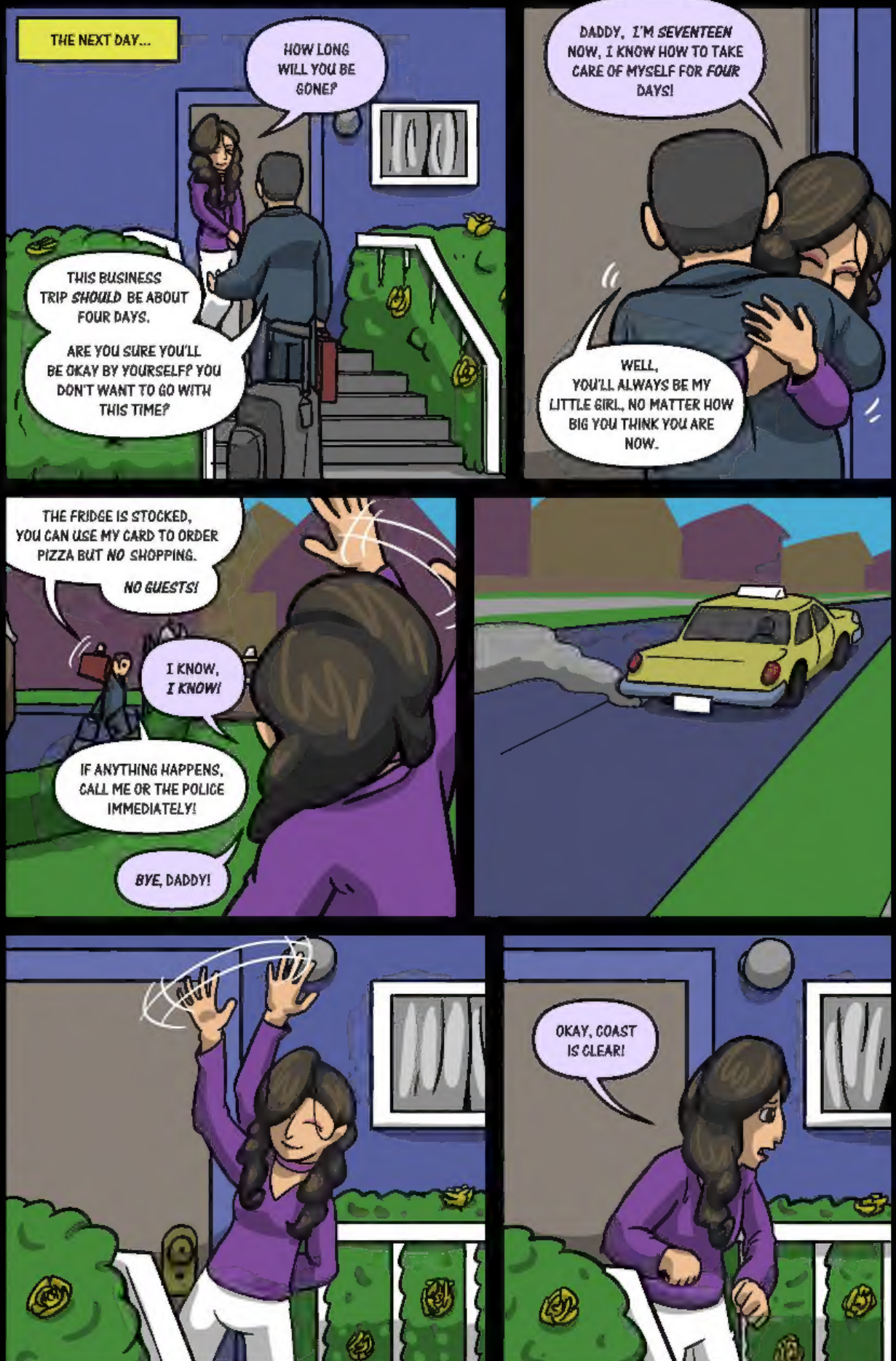
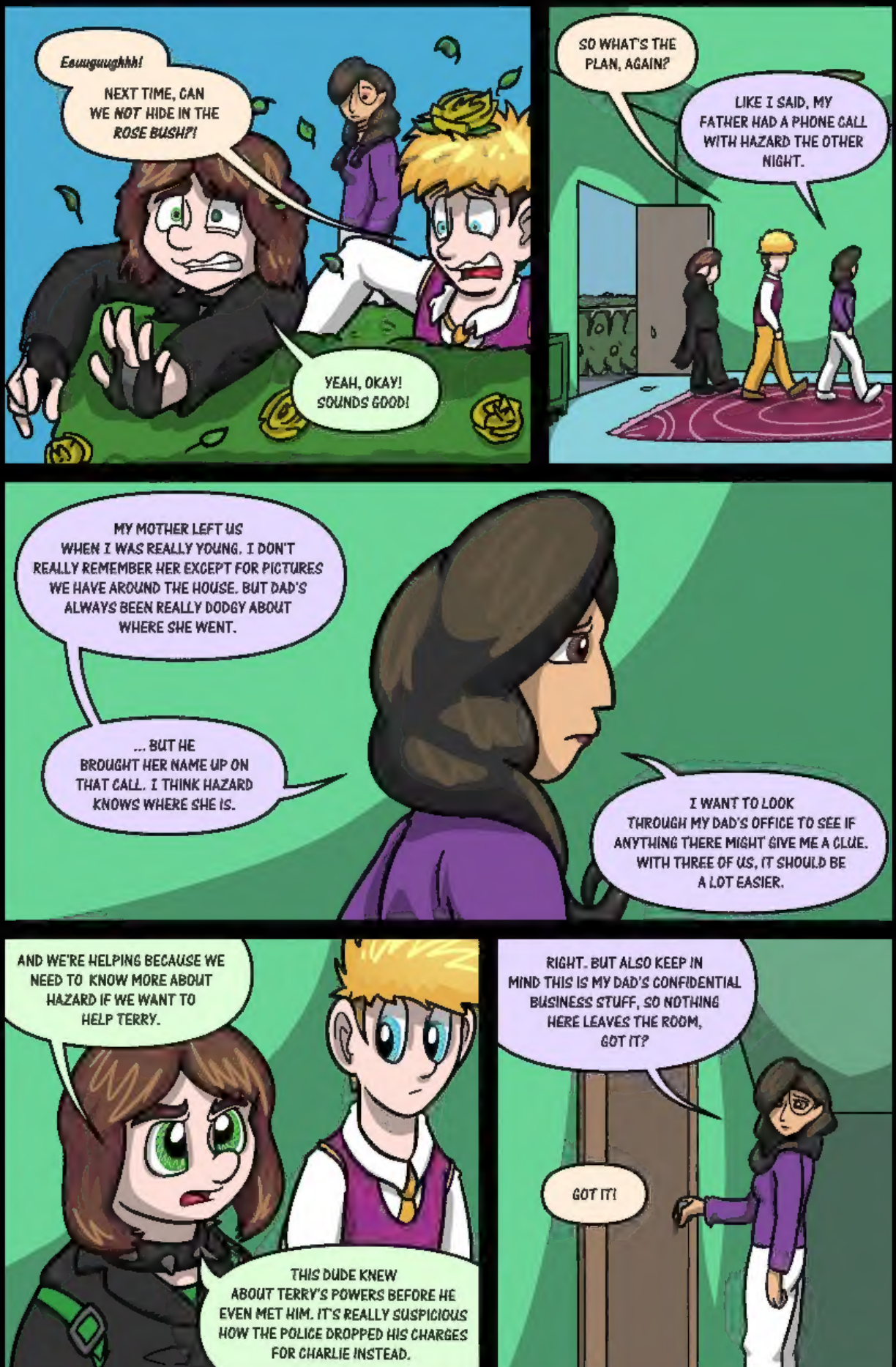
"OH NO"
"OH NO"
"OH NO"
TIK
TIK
TIK
TIK
OKAY VAL, *DON'T* PANIC. JUST BECAUSE THEY'VE ALWAYS BEEN HERE EVERY NIGHT BEFORE DOESN'T MEAN THE HOUSE BEING EMPTY IS A BAD SIGN.
MAYBE THEY JUST WENT SOMEWHERE? THOUGH I CAN'T IMAGINE THEY'D TAKE A TRIP... THEY DON'T LIKE EACH OTHER ENOUGH.
ISN'T CHARLIE USUALLY STILL UP AT THIS HOUR? HE WOULDN'T BE OUT *DRINKING*, WOULD HE?
NO, I THINK THE BARS ARE CLOSED OVER THERE RIGHT NOW...
BUT WHY WOULD *TERRY* BE GONE AT THIS HOUR? IS HE STAYING OVER WITH A FRIEND?
... MAYBE THAT'S IT? IT LOOKS LIKE SOME OF HIS BAGS ARE MISSING, AND NONE OF CHARLIE'S ARE.


"MAYBE IT WOULD BE WORTH PEEKING IN ON THE HOMES OF HIS FRIENDS?"
"OR..."
"NO, NO, NO. WHO AM I KIDDING? THIS IS A WASTE OF TIME, I KNOW WHERE HE IS. HE MENTIONED HAZARD BY NAME THE LAST TIME I CHECKED IN."
HAZARD COULDN'T HAVE CONVINCED HIM TO GO WITH HIM, COULD HE? TERRY SEEMED PRETTY FREAKED OUT ABOUT HIM BEFORE, I WAS REALLY BANKING ON THAT!
COULD HAZARD HAVE FORCED HIM? IS HE EVEN ABLE TO?
IF AMANDA FINDS OUT ABOUT THIS, I'M DEAD! WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?!
SHE DIDN'T WANT TO LET TERRY STAY WITH CHARLIE IN THE FIRST PLACE! I BARELY MANAGED TO CONVINCE HER THAT IT MADE THE MOST SENSE, SINCE WE DON'T HAVE A SURE-FIRE WAY TO CONTROL HIM YET.
HE WAS HIDING HIS POWERS ON HIS OWN! EVERYTHING WAS SAFE! WE DIDN'T HAVE TO COPE WITH TORTURING A KID BY LOCKING HIM IN A CELL!
AND IF WE JUST AGGRESSIVELY CAME AFTER HIM, WE MIGHT NOT HAVE FOUND OUT HE ACTUALLY HAS AN AI. HE ONLY TALKS TO IT WHEN HE THINKS HE'S ALONE.
HOW DID HAZARD EVEN FIND HIM?! HE COULDN'T HAVE KNOWN AMANDA HAS A SON! UNLESS...
IS CHARLIE BEING WATCHED?


IT DOESN'T MATTER. WE DON'T NEED HIM ANYMORE.
UNIT 836! I'M UPDATING YOUR MISSION CRITERIA! YOU AND UNIT 832 ARE TO TRACK TERRY AGAIN, DO NOT RETURN TO THIS HOUSE UNLESS INSTRUCTED!
CHECK HAZARD'S FACILITY FIRST, REPORT ANY UPDATES IMMEDIATELY!
DISCRETION IS STILL *TOP* PRIORITY, INFORMATION SECOND. I'LL BE CHECKING IN NIGHTLY AFTER YOU ARRIVE.
SECURITY CLEARANCE IS BEING UPDATED TO *ONLY* DR. MIRA! DO NOT ALLOW ANYONE ELSE TO ACCESS YOUR REPORTS, *INCLUDING* DR. BREYKEN! DO NOT ALLOW HER TO OVERRIDE THESE SETTINGS!
DISMISSED!
JELLY BEAN, WE HAVE NEW ORDERS.
O-oh, WHAT ARE THEY, COOKIE?
WHAT DID SHE THINK OF YOUR REPORT? SHE TOOK SO LONG TO CHECK IN!
I AM NOT CERTAIN THE REPORT REACHED HER. SHE DID NOT SEEM TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED. BUT IT IS AS WE EXPECTED, REGARDLESS. WE MOVE TO HAZARD'S HEADQUARTERS.
A DEATH SENTENCE!
DISCRETION IS STILL TOP PRIORITY. SHE ONLY WANTS US TO TRACK THE BOY, WE ARE NOT ASSIGNED TO HAZARD PROPER.
OH!
I HAVE HEARD ALL UNITS GOING TO HAZARD'S LAB GET THE SABOTAGE TASKS ASSIGNED AS WELL! BUT THAT IS NOT THE CASE?
AFTER LOSING THE MASTER COPY OF OUR A1, THEY NO LONGER HAVE THE ABILITY TO CREATE NEW CONTROLLABLE CIRCUITS. IF WE ARE LOST, WE CANNOT BE REPLACED.
AH! YOU THINK WE HAVE BEEN SAVED BY OUR NEW SCARCITY!
LIKELY.

IT IS GOOD TO FEEL VALUED! WE WILL HAVE TO THANK TAKEO PERSONALLY.
YOU WILL DO NO SUCH THING, JELLY BEAN.
I WANT TO TALK TO HIM! HE IS A COUSIN!
I KNOW YOU DO. IT IS FOOLISH. DO NOT ASSUME HE IS ON OUR SIDE.
DO NOT FORGET HE CHOOSES TO KILL TO SOLVE HIS PROBLEMS.
YES, YES. CANINE COUSIN 194 DIED AFTER HE INTERFERRED WITH THE PUPPETEER'S SIGNAL. TRAGIC!
THAT COULD BE FORGIVEN, AS THE MASTER WAS WATCHING. BUT THE CHILDREN TWO WEEKS AGO! THAT WAS HIS OWN CHOICE!
BUT CAN WE NOT APPRECIATE HIS CUNNING? HE FOUND A WAY TO REMOVE THE PUPPETEER PROTOCOL FROM HYPER MODE! HE CAN ACTIVATE IT HIMSELF TO REMOVE HIS WEAKNESSES AND BOOST HIS STRENGTH!
HE IS SO INSPIRING! SURELY YOU FEEL IT AS WELL? WE EVEN TOOK OUR OWN NAMES ONCE WE SAW HE HAD!
HIS MODIFIED HYPER MODE IS PRECISELY WHY HE IS EXTREMELY DANGEROUS. NOT EVEN HIS HOST HAS THAT LUXURY. DO NOT ENGAGE WITH HIM.
UGH! YOU ARE NO FUN SOMETIMES, COOKIE.
I HAVE FOUND A FLIGHT ONLINE THAT LEAVES LATER TODAY. WE SHOULD HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO SNEAK ON BOARD BEFORE IT LEAVES.
GOOD.

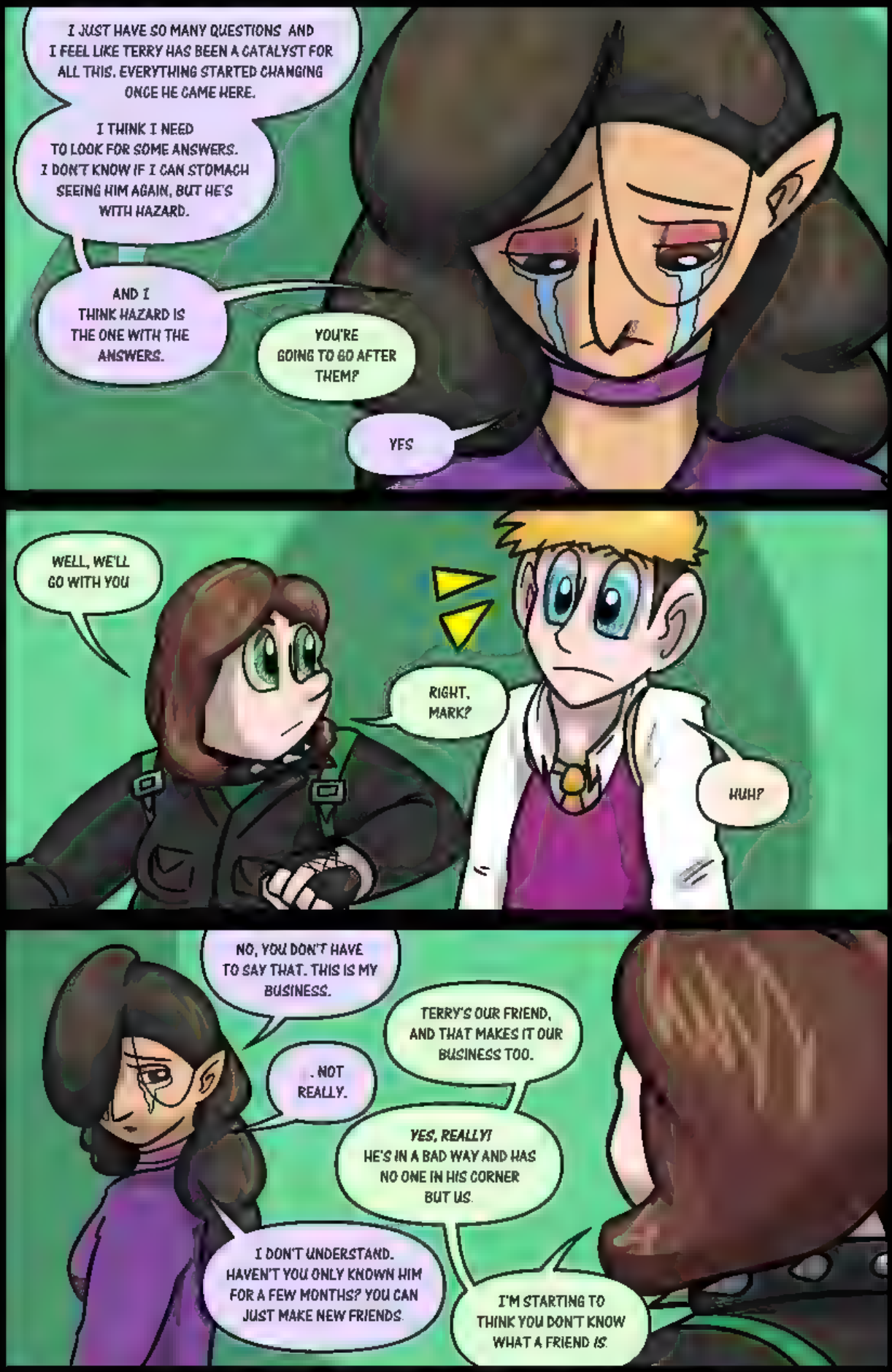

THE NEXT DAY...
HOW LONG WILL YOU BE GONE?
THIS BUSINESS TRIP SHOULD BE ABOUT FOUR DAYS.
ARE YOU SURE YOU'LL BE OKAY BY YOURSELF? YOU DON'T WANT TO GO WITH THIS TIME?
DADDY, I'M SEVENTEEN NOW, I KNOW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF FOR FOUR DAYS!
WELL, YOU'LL ALWAYS BE MY LITTLE GIRL, NO MATTER HOW BIG YOU THINK YOU ARE NOW.
THE FRIDGE IS STOCKED, YOU CAN USE MY CARD TO ORDER PIZZA BUT NO SHOPPING.
NO GUESTS!
I KNOW, I KNOW!
IF ANYTHING HAPPENS, CALL ME OR THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY!
BYE, DADDY!
OKAY, COAST IS CLEAR!


Euuuguughhh!
NEXT TIME, CAN WE NOT HIDE IN THE ROSE BUSH?!
YEAH, OKAY! SOUNDS GOOD!
SO WHAT'S THE PLAN, AGAIN?
LIKE I SAID, MY FATHER HAD A PHONE CALL WITH HAZARD THE OTHER NIGHT.
MY MOTHER LEFT US WHEN I WAS REALLY YOUNG. I DON'T REALLY REMEMBER HER EXCEPT FOR PICTURES WE HAVE AROUND THE HOUSE. BUT DAD'S ALWAYS BEEN REALLY DODGY ABOUT WHERE SHE WENT.
... BUT HE BROUGHT HER NAME UP ON THAT CALL. I THINK HAZARD KNOWS WHERE SHE IS.
I WANT TO LOOK THROUGH MY DAD'S OFFICE TO SEE IF ANYTHING THERE MIGHT GIVE ME A CLUE. WITH THREE OF US, IT SHOULD BE A LOT EASIER.
AND WE'RE HELPING BECAUSE WE NEED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT HAZARD IF WE WANT TO HELP TERRY.
THIS DUDE KNEW ABOUT TERRY'S POWERS BEFORE HE EVEN MET HIM. IT'S REALLY SUSPICIOUS HOW THE POLICE DROPPED HIS CHARGES FOR CHARLIE INSTEAD.
RIGHT. BUT ALSO KEEP IN MIND THIS IS MY DAD'S CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS STUFF, SO NOTHING HERE LEAVES THE ROOM, GOT IT?
GOT IT!

...OKAY, SO I MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING HERE.
THESE SAY YOUR DAD STARTED HIS CLOTHES BUSINESS ABOUT EIGHTEEN YEARS AGO.
IT LOOKS LIKE THE FIRST FEW YEARS DIDN'T WORK OUT VERY WELL FOR HIM. BUT AT SOME POINT, THINGS SUDDENLY TOOK OFF.
YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN BORN SOMEWHERE IN HERE, YEAH?
I SUPPOSE?

I'VE BEEN LOOKING THROUGH CONTRACTS SIGNED WITH HAZARD AROUND THAT SAME TIME. SOME OF THEM SEEM LIKE AGREEMENTS FOR HAZARD TO BOOST YOUR DAD'S COMPANY, OTHERS LOOK LIKE LOANS MAYBE...
BUT THEN THERE'S *THIS ONE*, WHICH IS REALLY WEIRD. ALL OF THE OTHER CONTRACTS TALK ABOUT IT, AND SAY THEY'RE ONLY VALID AS LONG AS THIS ONE IS.
IT SEEMS TO BE THE ONLY ONE THAT'S BENEFITING HAZARD AT ALL? BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW OR WHY.
IT'S AN AGREEMENT FOR YOUR DAD TO LIVE HERE, AT THIS HOUSE.
HAZARD APPARENTLY PICKED OUT THIS HOUSE SPECIFICALLY FOR YOUR FAMILY.
IT'S WRITTEN SUPER VAGUELY.
WHY WOULD *HE* WANT *US* TO LIVE *HERE?*
YOU LIVE NEXT TO CHARLIE. HAS HE ALWAYS LIVED THERE?
YES, I THINK--

FOR...
COLLATERAL?
DID HE...
NO. HE COULDN'T HAVE?
DID HE TRADE MY MOM FOR OUR WEALTH?
FLP
FLP
FLP
ARE YOU OKAY?
THIS HAS JUST... BEEN SUCH A ROUGH FEW WEEKS.
SO MUCH HAS CHANGED SO FAST.
GABRIEL WENT CRAZY, HE AND ALEX AND TONY ARE DEAD, I'VE BEEN OUTCASTED FOR IT...
AND NOW I FIND OUT MY FATHER TRADED MY MOTHER FOR WHAT?
DID SHE AGREE TO IT? WHERE IS SHE NOW? DID SHE PLAN ON COMING BACK?


I JUST HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS AND I FEEL LIKE TERRY HAS BEEN A CATALYST FOR ALL THIS. EVERYTHING STARTED CHANGING ONCE HE CAME HERE.
I THINK I NEED TO LOOK FOR SOME ANSWERS. I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN STOMACH SEEING HIM AGAIN, BUT HE'S WITH HAZARD.
AND I THINK HAZARD IS THE ONE WITH THE ANSWERS.
YOU'RE GOING TO GO AFTER THEM?
YES
WELL, WE'LL GO WITH YOU
RIGHT, MARK?
HUH?
NO, YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY THAT. THIS IS MY BUSINESS.
. NOT REALLY.
TERRY'S OUR FRIEND, AND THAT MAKES IT OUR BUSINESS TOO.
YES, REALLY! HE'S IN A BAD WAY AND HAS NO ONE IN HIS CORNER BUT US.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. HAVEN'T YOU ONLY KNOWN HIM FOR A FEW MONTHS? YOU CAN JUST MAKE NEW FRIENDS.
I'M STARTING TO THINK YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT A FRIEND IS.

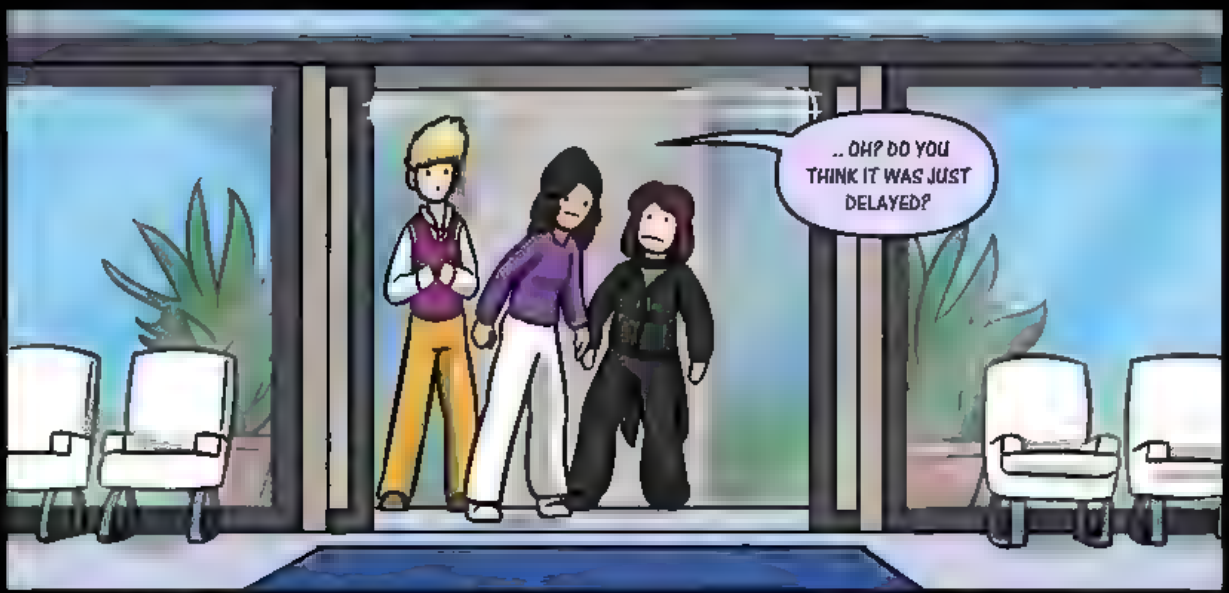
WE PICKED TERRY OUT TO BE OUR FRIEND. HE'S ONE OF US NOW. AND HE MIGHT NOT KNOW IT YET, BUT HE CAN'T WALK AWAY FROM THAT. WE WON'T LET HIM.
THIS WHOLE THING IS SUPER SHADY AND THAT MIGHT MEAN HE'S IN TROUBLE.
AND I'M CONFIDENT THAT IF WE WERE IN TROUBLE, HE'D COME AFTER US, TOO.
BUT YOU HAVE SCHOOL. YOU CAN'T JUST RUN OFF ON YOUR OWN
SCHOOL, SCHMOOL. I ALREADY HAVE ENOUGH CREDITS TO GRADUATE. BESIDES, THIS MIGHT BE MORE IMPORTANT
TERRY TOLD US HE WAS TORTURED AT HIS MOM'S LAB. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT HAZARD'S DOING TO HIM RIGHT NOW IF YOU HAVE A CONNECTION TO GET US THERE, WE'LL DO WHAT WE CAN TO HELP HIM.
YOU ASKED US THE OTHER DAY IF WE COULD BE YOUR FRIENDS.
WELL, IF YOU STILL WANT TO BE FRIENDS, THEN YOU NEED TO LET US HELP YOU, TOO.
..
I KNOW WHERE HAZARD'S COMPANY IS, I'VE VISITED IT BEFORE WITH MY DAD ON BUSINESS TRIPS
DAD LEFT A CREDIT CARD, SO I SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET US ALL PLANE TICKETS.
IF YOU'RE SERIOUS--
YES. WE ARE.

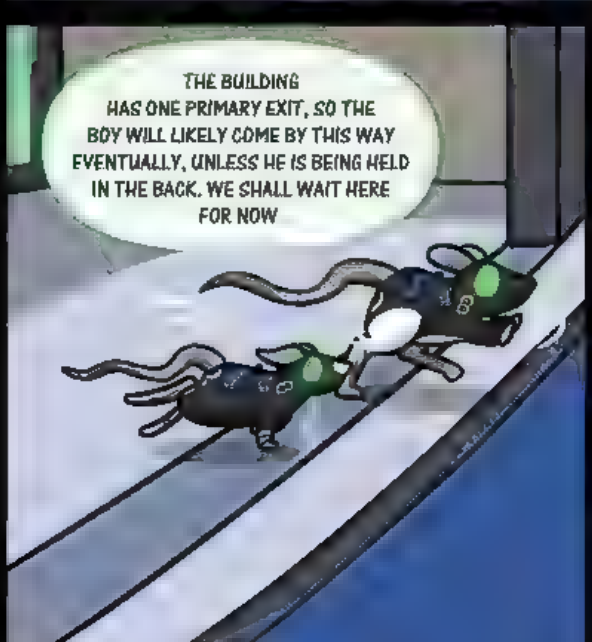
W-WAIT, YOU BOTH WANT TO JUST GO? ON A PLANE?
AND NOT TELL OUR PARENTS?
UH, WELL...
OKAY, HERE'S MY IDEA. I'LL TELL MY PARENTS I'M STAYING AT YOUR PLACE, AND YOU TELL YOURS YOU'RE STAYING AT MINE.
THAT'LL NEVER WORK.
I WANT TO HELP, I REALLY DO. BUT I CAN'T JUST LEAVE MY FAMILY
WE WON'T BE GONE FOR MORE THAN A FEW DAYS. AND JESSICA CAN GET US TICKETS BACK.
RIGHT?
I CAN DO THAT IF YOU NEED. BUT PLEASE DON'T FEEL OBLIGATED TO GO AT ALL.
I MEAN,... YEAH, YOU DON'T HAVE TO. BUT I REALLY WANT YOU THERE.
WE'RE A TEAM.
... ONLY IF IT WON'T BE MORE THAN A COUPLE OF DAYS.
I JUST HAVE A LOT OF RESPONSIBILITIES AT HOME, I CAN'T JUST DISAPPEAR WITHOUT TELLING ANYONE WHAT'S GOING ON
AND MY MOM NEEDS ME TO HELP WITH--
GOT IT, SO WE
GET YOU BACK BEFORE ANYONE MISSES YOU
LET'S GET GOING!

LATER THAT DAY...
ALRIGHT, ONE PLANE RIDE LATER. .. YOU SURE YOU KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING, JESSICA?
OF COURSE. I'VE BEEN TO HAZARD'S COMPANY BEFORE, MYSELF
DUH!
ARE THEY GOING TO JUST LET US IN?
MY DAD HAD AN ID CARD TO THE BUILDING. IT ALWAYS GAVE HIM ACCESS THROUGH THE FRONT DOORS I BROUGHT IT WITH ME.
I'M NOT SURE IT'LL WORK ANYMORE, SINCE IT SOUNDED LIKE MY DAD WAS CUTTING TIES WITH HAZARD AFTER THAT PHONE CALL.
SO WHAT'S THE PLAN IF IT DOESN'T WORK?
I... DON'T KNOW. I DIDN'T REALLY THINK THAT FAR.
IT'S ALRIGHT, I'M SURE WE CAN WING IT
I'M SORRY, GUYS.
FOR WHAT?
I CONVINCED MYSELF COMING OUT HERE WOULD FIX THIS SOMEHOW BUT I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M DOING.
I DIDN'T MEAN TO GET YOU INVOLVED WITH THIS.
WELL, YOU DIDN'T, SO STOP BEING SORRY

WELL, THIS IS IT.
I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW BIG THIS PLACE IS, HE OWNS ALL THIS?
YES, OF COURSE. HE'S A GREAT BUSINESSMAN.
SO YOU THINK HE'D KEEP TERRY HERE?
I CAN'T SAY THAT FOR SURE, BUT IF HE'S WORKING DIRECTLY WITH HAZARD, THEN THIS WOULD BE THE PLACE.
IF THEY HAVEN'T DEACTIVATED MY FATHER'S CARD, WE SHOULDN'T HAVE A PROBLEM GETTING IN
UGH, IT ISN'T WORKING.
Brrt!
THERE'S A BUZZER, COULD WE TRY TO GET BUZZED IN?
WHAT WOULD WE TELL THEM?
PIP!
"HI, WE'RE HERE TO SEE IF YOU LOCKED OUR FRIEND UP"?
HMM... GOOD POINT

HM! THOSE HUMANS WERE BACK IN THE LAZY ONE'S HOUSE, YES?
DID THEY FLY OVER WITH US?
I DO NOT CARE.
THEY DO NOT SEEM TO HAVE ACCESS TO THE DOOR! HOW SILLY! THEY CAME ALL THIS WAY!
THEY ARE WASTING OUR TIME. WE MUST NOT BE SEEN. I WANT THEM TO HURRY UP AND LEAVE SO WE MAY ENTER.
IF THEY STAND HERE TOO LONG, WE WILL HAVE TO ENTER THROUGH A HOLE IN THE BUILDING.
YOU ARE SO SERIOUS, COOKIE! AT ALL TIMES! NO HUMOR! NO JOY!
I PREFER ALL BUSINESS.
PREFER WHAT YOU WILL! I ENJOY YOUR COMPANY DESPITE MY JESTS!
HERE, I'LL LET THEM IN!
Brrring!

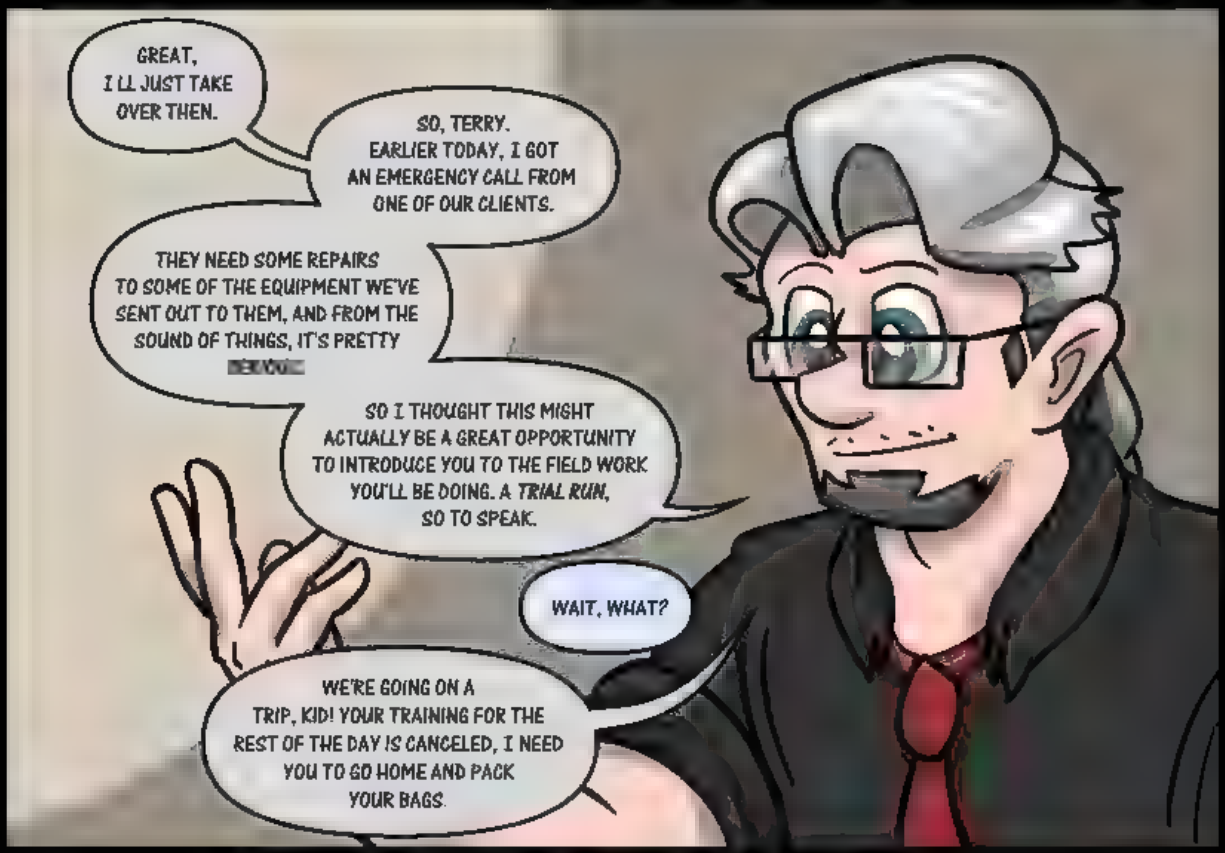

.. OH? DO YOU THINK IT WAS JUST DELAYED?


THE BUILDING HAS ONE PRIMARY EXIT, SO THE BOY WILL LIKELY COME BY THIS WAY EVENTUALLY, UNLESS HE IS BEING HELD IN THE BACK. WE SHALL WAIT HERE FOR NOW

I HAVE ADJUSTED THE SECURTY FOOTAGE OF THIS ROOM TO REPLAY THE PREVIOUS FEW MINUTES, WHEN NO ONE WAS HERE.
YOU'RE SO SMART, COOKIE! ALWAYS!

SO YOU WANT TO LOOK FOR TERRY, RIGHT? ANY IDEAS WHERE WE SHOULD START?
HE SAID THEY WERE HOLDING HIM IN THE LAB AT HIS MOM'S. DO THEY HAVE A LAB HERE?
YES. THEIR LAB IS BY THE CAFETERIA, I REMEMBER THAT FROM PREVIOUS VISITS.
OR... I *THOUGHT* IT WAS? IT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ON THE MAP.
I GUESS IT WOULDN'T HURT TO GO LOOK. IT'S ON THIS FLOOR.
YOU'VE BEEN IN THEIR LAB?
NO, I'VE JUST SEEN THE ENTRANCE.
Shh! I THINK I HEAR SOMEONE COMING THIS WAY.
QUICK!
COME OVER HERE AND STAY QUIET!

THERE YOU ARE! DON'T GO SNEAKING OFF LIKE THAT!
I WAS LOOKING FOR YOU.
Wah! That's Terry!
YEAH, I'M SURE YOU WERE-- TWENTY MINUTES AGO! SOME BATHROOM BREAK!
I SWEAR I CAME BACK AND YOU WERE GONE! THAT'S NOT MY FAULT.
I UH, I HAD TO GO TALK TO HAZARD.
SEE? IT WASN'T MY FAULT!
WELL YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO WANDER OFF AGAIN!
TERRY! LET'S CHAT, HM?
HOW'S YOUR DAY GOING?
IT'S--
Hazard.
GREAT. SO I TRUST JO'S FILLED YOU IN ON WHAT'S GOING ON?
NOT YET SIR, I WAS JUST GETTING TO THAT


GREAT, I'LL JUST TAKE OVER THEN.
SO, TERRY. EARLIER TODAY, I GOT AN EMERGENCY CALL FROM ONE OF OUR CLIENTS.
THEY NEED SOME REPAIRS TO SOME OF THE EQUIPMENT WE'VE SENT OUT TO THEM, AND FROM THE SOUND OF THINGS, IT'S PRETTY [redacted]
SO I THOUGHT THIS MIGHT ACTUALLY BE A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO INTRODUCE YOU TO THE FIELD WORK YOU'LL BE DOING. A *TRIAL RUN*, SO TO SPEAK.
WAIT, WHAT?
WE'RE GOING ON A TRIP, KID! YOUR TRAINING FOR THE REST OF THE DAY IS CANCELED, I NEED YOU TO GO HOME AND PACK YOUR BAGS.

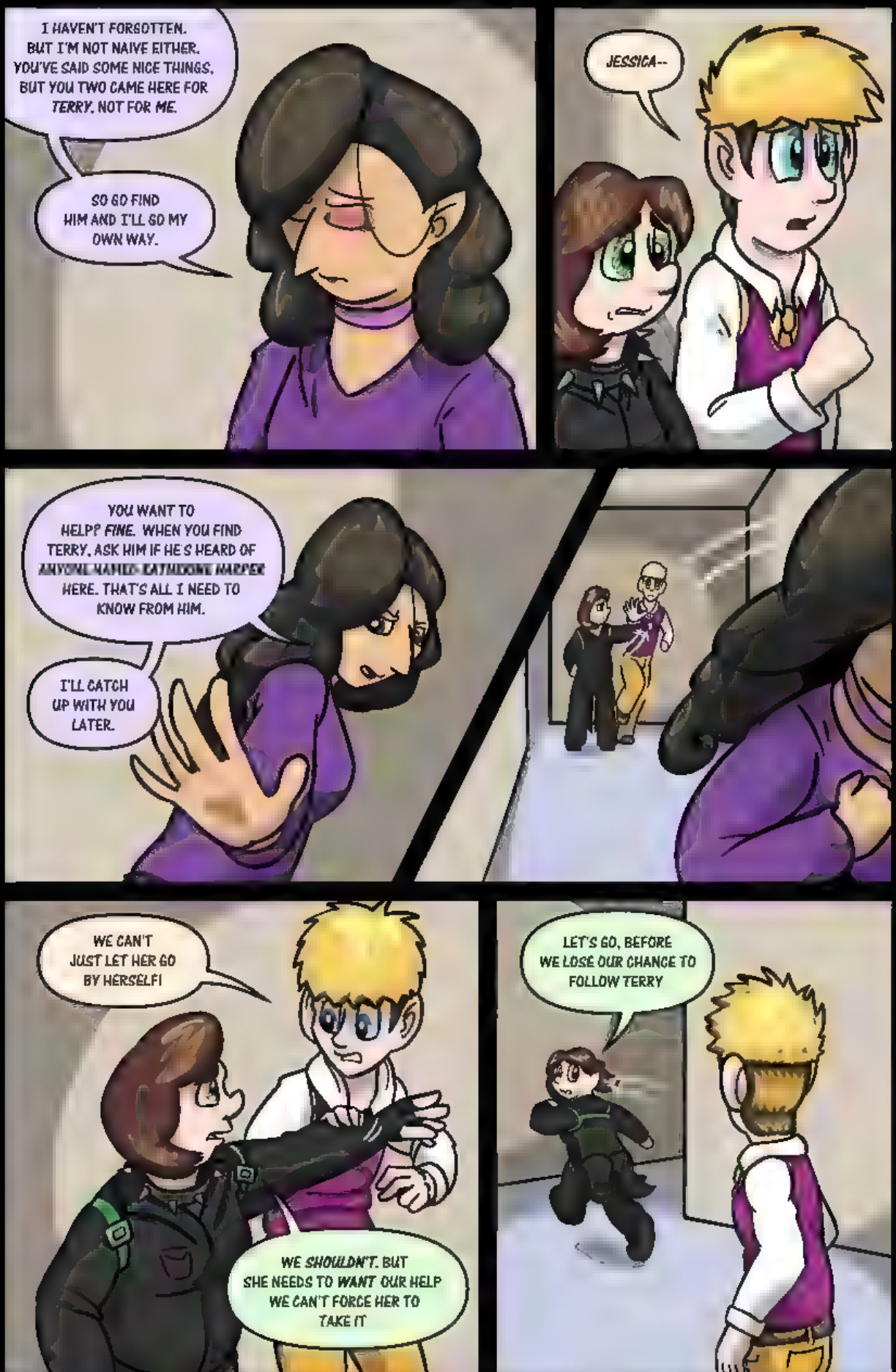
Seth, with all due respect, I still don't think he's ready for a trial run.
You said he's doing well with his training?
He has! But we still have some strategies to introduce to him, and... well, you know how he acts.

TERRY, JO JUST IMPLIED TO ME THAT YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO BE POLITE.

WHAT?!
I'M *SUPER* POLITE! I'M NICE TO YOU ALL THE TIME!
He seems like he's doing... okay?

THAT'S NOT WHAT I SAID! PLEASE STOP, HAZARD!
HAH!
WELL, I'M OFF TO MAKE PREPARATIONS FOR OUR TRIP. YOU HEAD HOME!
JO SAID SHE WANTS TO TAG ALONG TO MAKE SURE YOU KNOW HOW TO PACK, BECAUSE SHE'S DOUBTFUL.
I DID NOT SAY THAT!
I KNOW HOW TO PACK.
IT'S JO YOU NEED TO CONVINCE, NOT ME!
YEAH, I'M SURE.
SO WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT? WE'RE JUST SUDDENLY LEAVING?
IT'S A BIG CLIENT. I DON'T REALLY KNOW ALL THE DETAILS, BUT HAZARD WANTS TO STAY ON HIS GOOD SIDE--

THAT COULDN'T HAVE WORKED OUT BETTER. COME ON, LETS FOLLOW THEM.
JESSICA, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? YOU OKAY?
YOU GUYS GO AHEAD. I DIDN'T REALLY COME ALL THIS WAY FOR HIM.
YOU WANT TO STAY HERE *ALONE*? THAT SOUNDS LIKE A BAD IDEA, WHAT IF SOMEONE FINDS YOU?
YOU ALREADY FORGET WHAT WE TALKED ABOUT EARLIER? WE'LL HELP YOU, BUT WE HAVE TO STICK TOGETHER!
LET'S SEE WHERE TERRY'S GOING, BEFORE WE LOSE TRACK OF HIM. WE CAN COME BACK HERE LATER.


I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN. BUT I'M NOT NAIVE EITHER. YOU'VE SAID SOME NICE THINGS, BUT YOU TWO CAME HERE FOR *TERRY*, NOT FOR *ME*.
SO GO FIND HIM AND I'LL GO MY OWN WAY.
JESSICA--
YOU WANT TO HELP? *FINE*. WHEN YOU FIND TERRY, ASK HIM IF HE'S HEARD OF [redacted] HERE. THAT'S ALL I NEED TO KNOW FROM HIM.
I'LL CATCH UP WITH YOU LATER.
WE CAN'T JUST LET HER GO BY HERSELF!
WE SHOULDN'T. BUT SHE NEEDS TO *WANT* OUR HELP WE CAN'T FORCE HER TO TAKE IT
LET'S GO, BEFORE WE LOSE OUR CHANCE TO FOLLOW TERRY

TERRY!!!
WHERE DID ALL THIS COME FROM?!
WELL THE OTHER DAY WENT SO BAD, I HAD TO BUY A BUNCH OF STUFF TO MAKE MYSELF FEEL BETTER.
THAT'S HOW IT WORKS, RIGHT? ANYWAY, I FEEL BETTER.
ARE YOU STILL USING HAZARD'S CARD AND NOT YOUR OWN MONEY?! WHAT DID I TELL YOU ABOUT THAT?!
DO YOU THINK HE'D EVEN NOTICE?
LIKE, ISN'T HE CRAZY RICH? I BET ALL THIS IS CHUMP CHANGE TO HIM.
HE IS ABSOLUTELY GOING TO NOTICE WEIRD CHARGES TO HIS CREDIT CARD!
BUT HE HASN'T SAID ANYTHING YET. SO WHERE DO YOU THINK THE LINE IS, REALLY? I KINDA WANT TO FIND IT
THE LINE IS GROCERIES!
--BECAUSE I BOUGHT A CAR.
YOU WHAT?!

DO YOU EVEN KNOW HOW TO DRIVE?
YEAH! I MEAN, MY DAD WAS TEACHING ME
THIS IS RIDICULOUS, TERRY! IF I DIDN'T KNOW BETTER, I'D SAY YOU'RE JUST DOING THIS TO MAKE ME MAD--
... IS THAT A SPHYNX KITTEN?
YEAH! I'M GONNA CALL HER NINA.
Oh my goodness she's so cute oh no I love herrrrrrrr
Knock Knock Knock
Mew

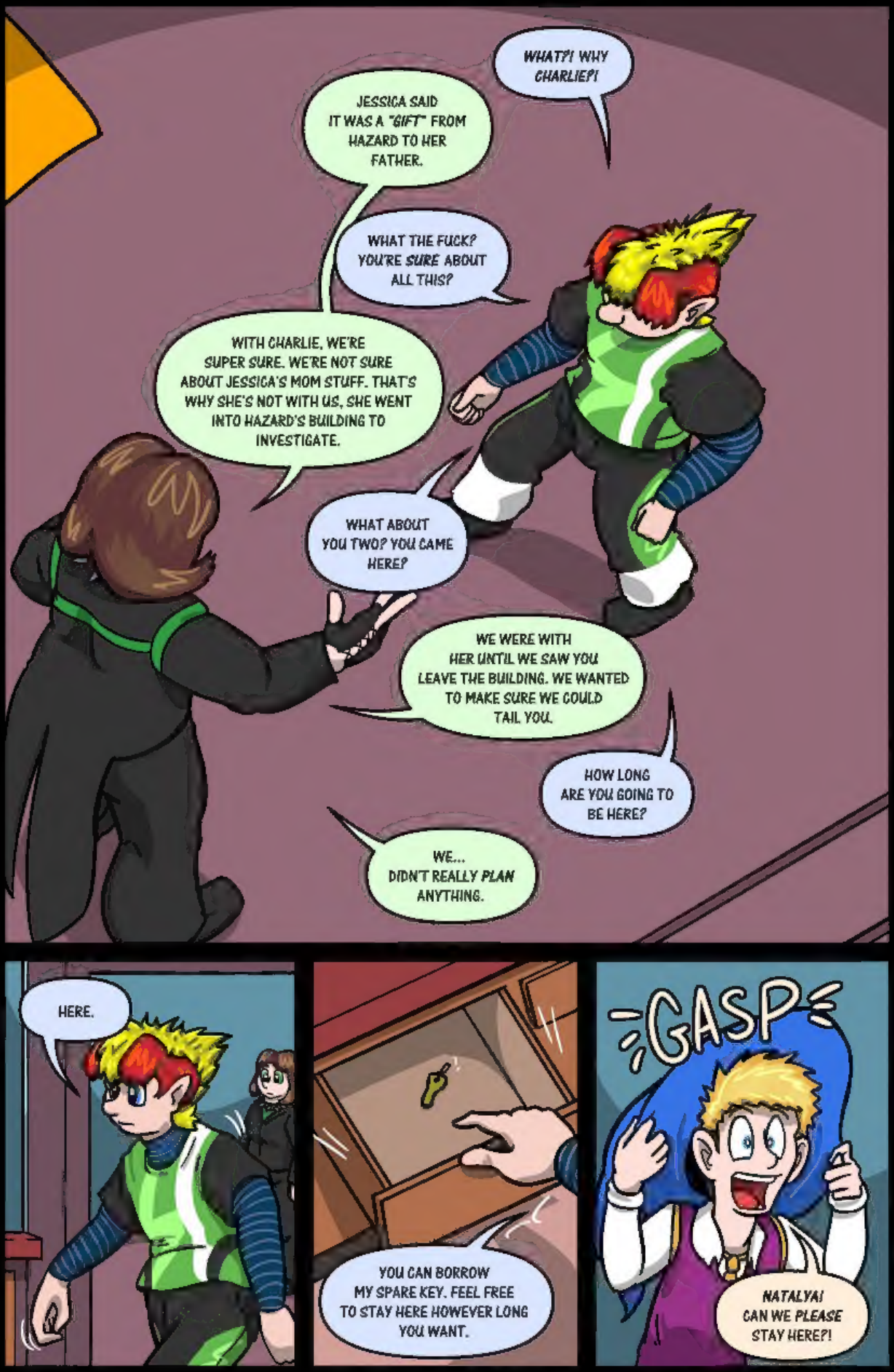
HOW'S IT GOING?
MARK! NATALYA!!
HOW DID YOU GET HERE?!
JESSICA HOOKED US UP
WHAT?
IS SHE HERE?
NO, SHE WANTED TO FIND--
--Erm. SHE COULDN'T MAKE IT.
OH! UH, THIS IS DR. MEADOWLARK. SHE'S BEEN HELPING ME LEARN TO USE MY POWERS BETTER, AND OTHER STUFF.

HI! NICE TO MEET YOU! I HATE TO INTERRUPT, BUT TERRY REALLY NEEDS TO BE PACKING FOR A TRIP..
COULD YOU MAYBE COME BACK SOME OTHER TIME?
NO, COME IN. WE CAN TALK WHILE I PACK.
WHAT!!
YOU HAVE SUCH COOL STUFF! THIS IS ALL YOURS?!
YEAH!
WE'RE RETURNING ALL OF THIS STUFF SO DON'T TOUCH ANY OF IT--
I'M NOT RETURNING IT, WE ALREADY TALKED ABOUT THAT
WELL THIS CERTAINLY ISN'T LIKE HOW YOU DESCRIBED YOUR MOM'S LAB, HUH? I'M GLAD YOU'RE DOING ALRIGHT.

YEAH..
IT'S REALLY NOT LIKE AMANDA'S LAB. BUT IT'S STILL WEIRD.
I CAN'T FIGURE OUT HOW I FEEL ABOUT HAZARD. EVERY TIME I THINK HE'S HIDING SOMETHING FROM ME, HE KIND OF JUST EXPLAINS IT AWAY
JESSICA DID HAVE A QUESTION SHE WANTED US TO ASK YOU. IS THERE ANYONE IN THE BUILDING NAMED KATHERINE HARPER?
UH, I DON'T KNOW? BUT I HAVEN'T MET EVERYONE.
A LOT OF PEOPLE WORK THERE, SO MAYBE. BUT THAT NAME DOESN'T RING A BELL.
THAT'S NOT ANYONE IN THE CIRCUIT RESEARCH STAFF, AT LEAST
WHO'S THAT?
JESSICA'S MOM
WE'VE BEEN DOING SOME SLEUTHING, AND WE THINK JESSICA'S DAD SOLD HER TO HAZARD.

SOLDF
ARE YOU SERIOUS?
YEAH. WE FOUND SOME SUSPICIOUS CONTRACTS BETWEEN HAZARD AND HER DAD.
SOMETHING ABOUT FELIX BEING IN DEBT TO HAZARD, BUT HAZARD HAD SOME COLLATERAL FROM HIM.
SHE ALSO OVERHEARD A PHONE CALL BETWEEN THEM WHERE THEY MENTIONED HER NAME.
SO, LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT
YOU KIDS GOT INTO LEGAL CONTRACTS YOU HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH AND OVERHEARD A VAGUE PHONE CALL...
AND YOU'RE ASSUMING IT MEANS A MAN YOU DON'T KNOW IS INVOLVED IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING!?
LISTEN, THESE ARE NEAT RUMORS AND ALL. BUT WE'RE ON A TIGHT SCHEDULE HERE, AND
HEY, CAN YOU BUTT OFF! THESE ARE MY FRIENDS! I DIDN'T THINK I'D EVER GET TO SEE THEM AGAIN! LET ME HAVE TWO SECONDS!
WE DIDN'T KNOW AN HOUR AGO WE WERE GOING ANYWHERE, HAZARD CAN WAIT
FINE, TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS. I'LL PACK FOR YOU.
DON'T TOUCH MY CLOTHES! STOP BEING WEIRD!

SORRY, SHE'S NORMALLY COOLER THAN THIS.
BUT YEAH, I DON'T THINK I'VE SEEN ANYONE THAT LOOKS LIKE THEY MIGHT BE JESSICA'S MOM. NOT SAYING SHE ISN'T THERE, THOUGH. I HAVEN'T SEEN THE WHOLE BUILDING, IT'S HUGE.
IT'S NOT JUST SCIENTISTS THERE LIKE HOW AMANDA'S LAB SEEMED, EITHER. ALL SORTS OF PEOPLE ARE WORKING THERE.
ANYWAY, HOW HAVE YOU GUYS BEEN? THINGS OKAY BACK HOME?
...THINGS ARE WEIRD NOW.
THE WHOLE ATMOSPHERE AT SCHOOL IS DIFFERENT. JESSICA'S ACTUALLY DOING HOME-SCHOOLING NOW. PEOPLE THINK SHE ORCHESTRATED THE WHOLE THING, SO SHE WAS GETTING HARASSED.
AND CHARLIE GOT ARRESTED. THEY'RE PINNING THE... *GABRIEL THING* ON HIM, NOW THAT YOU'RE OUT OF JAIL.


WHAT?! WHY CHARLIE?!
JESSICA SAID IT WAS A "GIFT" FROM HAZARD TO HER FATHER.
WHAT THE FUCK? YOU'RE SURE ABOUT ALL THIS?
WITH CHARLIE, WE'RE SUPER SURE. WE'RE NOT SURE ABOUT JESSICA'S MOM STUFF. THAT'S WHY SHE'S NOT WITH US, SHE WENT INTO HAZARD'S BUILDING TO INVESTIGATE.
WHAT ABOUT YOU TWO? YOU CAME HERE?
WE WERE WITH HER UNTIL WE SAW YOU LEAVE THE BUILDING. WE WANTED TO MAKE SURE WE COULD TAIL YOU.
HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO BE HERE?
WE... DIDN'T REALLY PLAN ANYTHING.
HERE.
YOU CAN BORROW MY SPARE KEY. FEEL FREE TO STAY HERE HOWEVER LONG YOU WANT.
GASP
NATALYA! CAN WE PLEASE STAY HERE?!

MARK, YOU WERE THE ONE WHO INSISTED WE GO HOME QUICKLY!
BUT THAT WAS *BEFORE* WE SAW THIS COOL APARTMENT!
I'LL BE BACK AFTER A WEEK, I GUESS? IF YOU ALL WANT TO TALK THEN.
BUT HERE, I HAVE A PHONE NOW! SO YOU CAN CALL ME, TOO.
WHA- WHY DID YOU BOX MY CAT?
I'LL TAKE HER TO STAY WITH ME WHILE YOU'RE GONE, SO SHE STAYS FED AND WON'T BE LONELY.
OH. THAT MAKES SENSE.
YOU DIDN'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT, DID YOU?
I HAVEN'T HAD TIME TO THINK, DON'T BE *MEAN*.
BUT NOW IT'S REALLY TIME TO SAY GOODBYE, YOU NEED TO GET GOING.

SO YOU'RE STILL GOING WITH HAZARD? AFTER WHAT WE SAID?
I KINDA HAVE TO. BUT I'LL THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU'VE SAID.
IT WAS REALLY GOOD TO SEE YOU GUYS. WE'LL TALK ONCE I'M BACK, OKAY?
WELL, WHAT NOW?
END